



NYC Department of
Homeless Services

Reducing Homelessness, Improving Lives.

2015-2017 Operational Plan

Mayor Bill de Blasio

Commissioner Gilbert Taylor

Guiding the
journey home.



March 2015

Over the past year, I've met with so many DHS staff and partners who taught me a great deal. I've seen your commitment. I've heard your input. And now it's time to realign the vision of DHS with our collective aspirations to reduce homelessness and improve lives.

With that input and purpose in mind, I am pleased to present the New York City Department of Homeless Services' (DHS) 2015 – 2017 Operational Plan. A new vision, a mission statement, core values, operating principles, and key strategies are at the heart of this document. All of these will serve to guide our work going forward.

Homelessness is a complex social issue that impacts communities at every level and is a source of grave concern to policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels. The common threads among homeless families and individuals are poverty, sub-living wages, and lack of affordable housing. In New York City, the lack of affordable housing, low wages, and rising rates of poverty tend to cause homelessness more so than they do in many other places. In addition, the unique right-to-shelter law in NYC vests us with a moral and legal obligation to assist homeless New Yorkers during their time of need. As Commissioner, I am committed to advancing our agency's vision and mission as well as to supporting the work that our dedicated staff and partners do each and every day to assist individuals and families in crisis.

Mayor de Blasio's leadership and commitment to homeless issues in this city have enabled DHS to make significant strides within the past year.

1. DHS has expanded our homelessness prevention initiatives by doubling the financial investment into the Homebase program to increase the number of Homebase offices in New York City to the highest levels in the history of the program.
2. DHS has expanded our agency's outreach work for unsheltered homeless New Yorkers to include subway outreach—which we took over from the MTA—and has more than doubled the level of funding to enhance and strengthen their work.
3. DHS has strengthened the work that is being done in shelter with homeless individuals and families by focusing on improving physical plant conditions and by improving social service programming in all DHS shelter types.
4. DHS has increased the number of available housing resources for homeless individuals and families to help them exit shelter and move into permanent and stable housing by creating rental assistance programs and by making access to public housing available once again for qualified homeless families.

The most important thing I learned in the listening tour that I embarked on when I became Commissioner is that being homeless is about much more than just not having a place to sleep or shelter. It's about not having a home.

What is a home, really? The word means so much to us because we know it means so much more than a roof and four walls.

- A home is a center of connection
- A home is a foundation of community
- A home is a source of support

And when you don't have these things, it is truly a time of crisis.

The Journey Home

During the next three years, we will build on the foundation that we have created from our first year and refocus our efforts to meet the challenges facing New Yorkers who are threatened with housing instability and homelessness. Specifically, this plan will enable us to identify long-term sustainable strategies to assist people to achieve housing self-sufficiency; use the existing system of resources and services established as a safety net to best serve our clients; improve case management; and achieve more efficient coordination of services across the DHS system of care.

There are no easy answers to this complex problem. Each individual and family is on a long and difficult journey home. It's our mission to make that journey easier with the support, connection, and community that they need to take each step.

When we work together, we can guide their journey home.

Sincerely,

Gilbert Taylor

Gilbert Taylor
Commissioner



Our Vision

Vision Statement

Reducing Homelessness, Improving Lives

Mission Statement

With our partners, our goal is to prevent homelessness when possible; to provide temporary, emergency shelter when needed; and to help individuals and families transition rapidly into permanent housing. We do this through providing coordinated, compassionate, high-quality services and supports.

Operating Principles

- Implementing our legal mandate to temporarily house those in need.
- Informing communities about the drivers and dynamics of homelessness.
- Recognizing that poverty in New York City often manifests itself as homelessness.
- Supporting the creation of affordable housing and living wages.
- Implementing the New York City model of practice for homeless services.

Core Values

Excellence.

Provide the highest quality services to all clients.

Compassion.

Provide services with empathy.

Hope.

Inspire or encourage all clients to achieve their goals.

Integrity.

Provide all services to clients with reliability and consistency.

Resilience.

Provide strength and support to our clients in the face of adversity.



Our Goals

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Prevention.

In collaboration with our partners, we provide comprehensive services that combat the many drivers of homelessness.

Outreach.

We deploy teams throughout the city 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, to engage and move people living on the streets and in subways into transitional and permanent housing.

Shelter.

We provide temporary, emergency, and safe transitional housing to eligible individuals and families.

Housing Permanency.

We help our clients maintain their housing, and we transition clients who are in shelter into permanent and stable housing.

Organizational Excellence.

We provide the best possible training, tools, opportunities, and supervision to all of our employees and our provider network. We are developing a culture where our model of practice is informed by data and results.



Prevention

In collaboration with our partners, we provide comprehensive services that combat the many drivers of homelessness.

1. Deliver prevention services through existing community networks and neighborhood-based organizations.

- Partner with a wide variety of community-based, faith-based, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations to provide a network of support for people facing housing instability.
- Enhance and expand Homebase services to address and reduce single adult and family homelessness.
- Implement an ongoing communication strategy about homelessness and the services available to individuals and families through the Homebase program.

2. Deliver prevention services through strong coordination across government agencies at city, state, and federal levels.

- Convene quarterly meetings of the Deputy Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Homelessness to share, promote, and implement best practices.
- Coordinate with other agencies to enhance the effectiveness of homeless prevention services.

3. Define and deliver the New York City model for preventing homelessness.

- Connect clients to services and supports that ensure that they can remain housed in their communities.
- Develop consistent intake and assessment tools across all relevant agencies and organizations.
- Identify alternatives to shelter for adults, adult families, and families with children.
- Inform and engage communities across the city about the services available to prevent homelessness.
- Implement quality assurance measures to ensure that preventive services are of the highest quality.

Outreach



Throughout the city, we deploy teams around the clock to encourage people living on the streets and in subways to move into transitional and permanent housing.

1. Increase the number of quality services delivered in safe havens, drop-in centers, and stabilization beds for street and subway homeless.

- Identify additional resources and beds for street and subway homeless clients, including the services of the faith-based community and the interests of philanthropic foundations.
- Strategically place safe havens and drop-in centers in areas of high concentration of street homeless individuals.
- Inform the public about how to connect street and subway homeless individuals to DHS services.

2. Develop and coordinate a multi-agency approach to addressing street and subway homeless.

- Develop policies, procedures, and strategies with other agencies to reduce the number of unsheltered individuals living on the streets and in subways.
- Develop and implement policies, procedures, and strategies to most effectively work with chronic street homeless individuals.
- Augment existing models of outreach services to better incorporate health and mental health services.
- Inform and engage communities around the city about the services available to individuals sleeping on the streets and in the subways.



Shelter

We provide temporary, emergency, and safe transitional housing to eligible individuals and families.

1. Reenvision the models of shelter provided in New York City.

- Develop shelters with services that benefit communities.
- Develop flexible financing models for shelter that promote increased pathways to permanency.
- Coordinate with city, private, philanthropic, and stakeholders in communities that host DHS shelters throughout New York City.
- Expand the DHS network of developers, brokers, landlords, and nonprofit service providers.
- Promote shared responsibility and accountability between clients and providers.
- Reduce focus on cluster sites, focus instead on purpose-built shelters.
- Examine security practices across the shelter system, with particular emphasis on cluster site temporary housing.

2. Develop a model of practice that provides a full range of high-quality services and supports in all shelters.

- Provide services that are tailored to individuals and families, allowing access to vocational, educational, recreational, childcare, and health-related services.
- Staff shelters appropriately to meet client needs and to strengthen the provision of social services, case management, housing placement, and security.
- Create provider system of accountability that focuses on quality services and safety for clients.
- Implement plan to ensure that cluster site operators provide the appropriate level of social services for our clients.

3. Improve physical plant conditions throughout the DHS shelter system.

- Create a regulatory compliance / internal audit unit to oversee building and code compliance at DHS and provider-run shelters.
- Ensure that the physical conditions of all facilities are assessed by the agency's Maintenance and Repair Unit.
- Use capital funding to improve aging and hard-used infrastructure.
- Work with providers to improve and assess community and recreational spaces for clients in shelters.
- Engage nonprofit institutions and volunteer organizations to help beautify public spaces in shelters.
- Develop and implement the best practices for design standards for shelter.

4. Build stronger partnerships with multiple government agencies and community-based organizations to provide services.

- Establish memorandums of understanding to clarify the role of government agencies that work with special client populations.
- Strengthen coordination with community networks and program services to assist individuals and families with reintegration into their community.

Housing Permanency



We help our clients maintain housing, and we transition clients who are in shelter into permanent and stable housing.

1. Identify and connect clients to housing opportunities.

- Administer rental assistance programs for eligible shelter clients.
- Reduce the agency's reliance on cluster sites for shelter and, when possible, return those units to the affordable housing market.
- Develop tailored Independent Living Plans (ILPs) for clients in shelter and connect them to appropriate housing.

2. Build strong partnerships with community organizations to provide aftercare and support to our clients as they transition out of shelter.

- Connect all clients who exit shelter to high-quality community-based programs and resources.
- Engage faith-based, community, and civic leaders across the city to support individuals and families who need assistance transitioning out of shelter.

3. Design and implement effective aftercare models for all clients.

- Create a model of practice for aftercare services that is tailored to meet the needs of clients who exit shelter.
- Highlight the importance of coordination across government agencies and community organizations to support transition from shelter.

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Organizational Excellence



We provide the best possible training, tools, opportunities, and supervision to all our employees and our provider network. We are developing a culture where our model of practice is informed by data and results.

1. Enhance and strengthen system-wide trainings for all staff and providers.

- Create a curriculum to train all staff and providers on the New York City model of practice for homeless services.
- Emphasize skills needed to serve clients and include such modules as new staff orientation, project management, mentoring, team building, case management, motivational interviewing, and team conferencing.

2. Establish clear expectations and accountability for all provider agencies.

- Ensure all shelter sites are contracted and contain provisions for active enforcement.
- Develop and implement quality assurance standards and indicators.
- Develop a continuous quality improvement model.
- Deliver technical assistance and resource supports to all staff providers.
- Collaborate with other agencies to inspect, preserve, and expand DHS's shelter stock, while simultaneously creating housing opportunities for clients.
- Develop inspection and monitoring protocols that are uniform system-wide to ensure that shelters are in compliance with safety and security mandates.

3. Encourage employee engagement, incentives, and appreciation.

- Engage employees and managers in discussions about career ladders, training, and educational incentives to improve the work environment.
- Develop mentoring models for staff.

4. Establish Home.Stat for performance measurement and quality assurance.

- Pursue data-driven strategies, evidence-informed practices, a culture of accountability, and shared responsibility with all employees and providers.
- Establish a uniform case management system across the service continuum.
- Implement performance evaluations and provider accountability.
- Implement uniform facility standards to improve health and safety.



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